

VZCZCXR03610
PP RUEHCI
DE RUEHKA #5723 2501122
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071122Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1439
INFO RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7555
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1263
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8673
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9318
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 005723

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM ASEC CASC BG

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION-LED SIEGE ON ELECTION COMMISSION ENDS
IN VIOLENCE

Classified By: Acting A/DCM Dundas McCullough; reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Sporadic clashes broke out between demonstrators and police when the Awami League-led opposition launched a siege of the Election Commission (EC) on September 6 demanding reform of the electoral process and caretaker government. Dozens of protestors, including the political secretary to the president of the AL, were injured. The

SIPDIS

opposition parties have called a country-wide strike for September 10, and announced a series of other actions leading up to Ramadan. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) The AL-led 14-party opposition alliance organized a siege on EC offices in Dhaka and around the country on September 6. The stated aim was to force the GOB to remove the election commissioners and enact reforms to the electoral and caretaker government systems. Two days before the siege, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police imposed a ban on gatherings or rallies around the EC Secretariat premises.

¶3. (SBU) Clashes broke out when protestors attempted to remove police barricades blocking the roads to the EC Secretariat. Some protestors started throwing bricks and

SIPDIS

rocks, and the barricades were breached in some areas. The police responded with volleys of tear gas and baton charges on protestors. According to press accounts, between 50 and 100 people were injured in the violence. Among those injured were several prominent AL leaders, including Saber Hossain Chowdhury, political secretary to AL president Sheikh Hasina.

¶4. (C) Saber was reported in the press to be "critically injured" and it said he might be flown out of the country for treatment. AL leaders assured us the following day that he was "out of danger." Ambassador briefly spoke to Saber on September 7. He said that he was feeling better but might go to Singapore for treatment.

¶5. (C) In spite of the press coverage of the protests (including the Daily Star's headline "Police go wild to thwart EC siege attempt"), AL leaders we spoke to indicated "their boys" provoked the police. Amir Hossain Amu, an AL Presidium member who was at the siege, told us "you understand, the police put the barricades up, and our boys had to try to break them."

¶6. (C) Also contradicting many press reports, AL Joint Secretary Mukul Bose, who also participated in the siege,

SIPDIS

told us that the police were "not aggressive" and that "our

boys provoked them." When asked how many people he thought were injured, he smiled and said it was hard to tell since many were probably injured by bricks that fell short of the police and landed in the crowd.

¶7. (C) The opposition has called a country-wide dusk-to-dawn strike for September 10 "in protest of police atrocities" during the EC siege. Bose said that he thought the strike would be a "limited success," but they were expecting a better turnout on their siege of the Prime Minister's Office on September 12. He said that the opposition was still considering calling for an indefinite sit-in after their "grand rally" on September 18, but that once Ramadan started they would curtail, but not end, their activities.

BUTENIS